

The various interesting sets of short Essays, with the Spectator and Rambler at their head, must have had a very considerable influence, during a season at least, and not yet entirely extinct, on the moral taste of the public. Perhaps, however, it is too late in the day for any interest to be taken in religious animadversions which might with propriety have been ventured upon the Spectator, when it was the general and familiar favourite with the reading portion of the community.* A work of such wide compass, and avowedly assuming the office of guardian and teacher of all good principles, gave fair opportunities for a Christian writer to introduce, excepting what is strictly termed science, a little of every subject affecting the condition and happiness of men. Why then was it fated that the stupendous circumstance of the redemption by the Messiah, of which the importance is commensurate with the whole interests of man, with the value of his immortal spirit, with the government of his Creator in this world, and with the happiness of eternity, should not a few times, in the long course and extensive moral jurisdiction of that work, be set forth in the

* "Within the thirty or forty years antecedent to the date of the present edition," says Foster, writing in 1830, "and even within the shorter interval since the slight remarks in the text were written, there has been a surprising change in the tone of our literature, and in the public taste which it both consults and forms. The smooth elegance, the gentle graces, the amusing, easy, and not deep current of sentiment, of which Addison is our finest example, have come to be regarded as languid, and almost insipid; and the passion is for force, energy, bold development of principles, and every kind of high stimulus. This has been the inevitable accompaniment of the prodigious commotion in the state of the world, the rousing of the general mind from its long lethargy, to an activity and an exertion of power which nothing can quell, which is destined to a continually augmenting operation till the condition of the world be changed. This new spirit of our literature is a great advantage gained; but gained at a grievous cost; for we have in its train an immense quantity of affectation: all sorts and sizes of authors must be aiming at vigour, point, bold strokes, originality. The consequence is, an ample exhibition of contortion, tricks of surprise, paradox, headlong dash, factitious fulmination, tod turgid inanity. In some of the grossest instances, this ape of mental force and freedom stares and swaggers, and spouts p half-drunken rant. One wonders to see how much even some of the ablest among the writers of the present times have gone into the bad fashion, have discarded the masculine simplicity so graceful to intellectual power, and spoiled compositions admirable for vigorous thinking by a continual affectation, which, carries them along in a dashing capering sort of style, as if determined that the 'march of intellect' shall be a dance to a fiddle."